

# Former NFL Player Barrett Brooks visits Chester High Students



Lorraine Lavender-Sams

With the school year winding down and students antsy for the freedom of a carefree summer, it seemed an ideal time for Dana Bowers, Chester Upland School District's Emotional Learning Coordinator,

to host Barrett Brooks at Chester High School.

After 12 years in the NFL, Barrett Brooks has made an enviable career for himself. Proud of his SuperBowl winning achievements on the field and in and around the broadcast arena, I dare say that it's most definitely his decisions and choices off the field that give him the greatest sense of pride. Barrett is a motivational speaker, an Emmy Award-winning sports broadcast journalist, and an entrepreneur. Brooks works for NBC Sports Philadelphia, calls the Big 12 games for ESPN, and owns Brooks Alternative Services, a Healthcare Services Agency. Brooks says, "When I speak, I just tell the truth, and hopefully someone in this auditorium will hear what I have to say and leave here and make good positive choices." Once the students leave this auditorium, there's a real-world out there.

A 2nd round draft pick for the Philadelphia Eagles in 1995 out of Kansas State; Brooks graduated from Kansas State University with a degree in Sociology. He went on to earn a Master's degree in health care administration from Colorado Tech. Not bad for a young man from St. Louis, Missouri, raised in Kinloch, a place at the time noted for having the highest crime rate in the entire nation.

Humble and brutally honest, Brooks met the students on their playground, focusing his conversation more on choices. He spoke about the consequences of making bad decisions and posting something to a social media platform that will haunt you when you go to apply to college or for employment. In his honesty, Brooks disclosed the poor choices made by one of his sons, leading



to him becoming involved with the criminal justice system. As Brooks sees it, it always comes down to; the choices you make in life. A choice was what Brooks made when he decided to become an unpaid intern post his Super Bowl XL win with the Pittsburgh Steelers against the Seattle Seahawks. Beyond football, Brooks set his sights on a career in broadcasting, and he set about doing the work that it took for him to be successful. Being humble enough to take on an unpaid intern-

ship has paid off.

The students were attentive as Brooks told his story. With a commanding presence at a hulking 6 feet 5 inches tall with a booming voice, he's hard to ignore. His journey hasn't been easy, but through it all his mantra has always been, "Whatever I do, I do to the best of my ability. I hated football with a passion," said Brooks. The only reason I played was because my mother made me. It was either play sports or be in the house because back then when the street lights came on, you had to be in the house.

Brooks told the students that at this time, all that they should be concerned about was getting good grades and preparing themselves for the future.

Dana Bowers, the Social Emotional Learning Coordinator for the Chester Upland School District, is a longtime friend of Brooks and was instrumental in bringing him to Chester High to speak with the students. A welcome recent addition to the staff of the Chester Upland School District (CUSD), Bowers brings a 20-year background as an educator and social worker to the position. "I want to take any opportunity to expose our students to uplifting outside field trips and having speakers in who can share positive life experiences."

Darren Laws, Climate Manager for Chester High School said, "It's not about us. It's about setting a foundation for our students."

Principal Brown said, "I'm delighted that our students get to hear from this SuperBowl winning athlete who has been able to achieve so many other things due to his dedication and drive." This is a motivational event for our students.

Brooks ended his uplifting motivational conversation with a question and answer session followed by an autograph session.

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